



Analysing sources

To help you evaluate the worth of a source, consider the following.

1. Type of source

- Is it a primary or secondary source?

2. Authenticity

- Has it been translated? Some translators are better than others at choosing words with similar connotations; 'to be frightened' is not the same as 'to be terrified'.
- Have any words been left out? Look for [...] which indicates omissions.
- Is it a small section of a larger work, and could the lack of context distort the meaning?

3. Reliability

- Is it from a trustworthy source?
- What do you know about the author of the source?
 - Is the author a prominent person, an expert in this field, an eyewitness, a participant?
 - Would he/she know what they are talking about in this instance?
 - Does the author represent a particular nationality or class?
- Would the author be biased in any way?
 - What is their purpose in writing?
 - Who is their intended audience?
 - Would they be frank and honest?
- How credible is the publisher/creator of the book or website?
 - Is it a well-known publishing company?
 - If it is from a website, is it a reputable one? Check the URL for clues. Self-published books and amateur websites may be less reliable than others as there may have been no editorial review or professional proofreading.

4. Representativeness

- Is the view presented typical or extreme?
- Does the view generally agree with other sources you have read?
- Does it present interesting insights not available elsewhere?

5. Relevance

- Is the source relevant to your investigation? It could be on the general topic, but not relevant to the particular aspect you are examining.

6. Accuracy

- Check the facts:
 - Are they verifiable, objectively reported?
 - Are the dates, names and places correct?
- If the facts aren't right, how much confidence can we have with the opinions that are expressed?

Adapted from: Hall, H & Nunan, K 2004, *Year 11 Modern History Skills: Analysing documents*, Education Queensland. Available Internet: <<http://education.qld.gov.au/tal/tips/docs/02180/analyse.html>> (Accessed 30 November 2005)